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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 5635  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1839  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0305  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0229  
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SUBJECT: BHUTANESE REFUGEE DONOR GROUP REVIEWS RESETTLEMENT  
PROCESSING PREPARATIONS

11. Summary: UNHCR Nepal Representative Abraham Abraham convened a Donor Group meeting on August 24 to review developments in establishing security in the Bhutanese refugee camps and preparing for large-scale resettlement processing. According to Abraham, police would be deployed 24/7 to all seven camps as soon as construction of quarters were constructed, but during current limited patrols they had already arrested five refugees accused of vandalism and assault. Once police are deployed permanently, the GON would publicly explain its policy regarding resettlement, after which UNHCR would disseminate information on the resettlement process and begin referring cases to resettlement countries. The GON had nearly completed its review of the May census results, and UNHCR would soon issue ID cards to refugees. The GON has promised to simplify the currently convoluted exit visa process. Rejectionist factions are still resisting the resettlement option and seeking to intimidate refugees who pursue it. GON officials, including the Prime Minister, had also suggested it might be necessary to create a new camp solely for those pursuing resettlement. Participants expressed skepticism that a recent comment by Indian Prime Minister Singh reflected any change in Indian policy toward the Bhutanese refugee problem.  
End Summary

Refugee Donor Meeting Discusses Preparations  
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12. UNHCR Representative to Nepal Abraham Abraham convened a Bhutanese refugee donor meeting on August 24 to discuss recent developments in refugee camp security and preparations for large-scale, third-country resettlement processing. Ambassador represented the United States. Also attending were representatives of Australia, Denmark, Germany, the UK, Norway, Finland, Canada, the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO), and the World Food Program. (Note these are "donors" involved in assistance to the Bhutanese camps, and not all members of the "Core Group.")

Camp Security

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¶3. Abraham reported that, although the Government of Nepal (GON) had announced a policy allowing third-country resettlement for Bhutanese refugees in July, UNHCR had not been able so far to refer large numbers of refugees to resettlement countries because of the unsettled security situation in the camps. He noted that the situation in the camps was still tense, with refugees who expressed interest in the resettlement option being subjected to threats and intimidation by factions opposed to it. The GON had agreed to deploy Armed Police Force (APF) units to the camps, but the deployment will not take place until police quarters are completed in each camp. Abraham reported that UNHCR had contracted with Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to construct the police posts, and that construction was expected to begin August 27 simultaneously in all seven camps and be completed by the end of September. Police were already taking a more active role in enforcing order in the camps. Abraham related that during the week of August 20, for the first time, the police had taken into custody five Bhutanese refugees suspected of vandalism and assault in Beldangi 2 camp and held them for investigation. Their victims--also refugees--reportedly were willing to testify against the suspects in police custody.

#### Resettlement Timeline

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¶4. Abraham described the projected timeline for large-scale resettlement processing. Once construction of the police posts is complete and the APF units deployed to the camps in early October, the Jhapa Chief District Officer (CDO) will visit each camp to publicly announce and explain the GON

policy authorizing resettlement for those refugees who wished to pursue it. After the GON announcement, UNHCR would disseminate information on resettlement and accept declarations of interest from refugees. Resettlement countries could expect to begin receiving large batches of UNHCR referrals by November.

#### Update on U.S. OPE

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¶5. Refcoord informed the group that the Ministry of Home Affairs had agreed the U.S. "Overseas Processing Entity" (OPE) could be located in Damak, near the refugee camps, rather than in Bhadrapur as the CDO had been urging, and that the Cabinet had approved an MOU for the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to open an office in Nepal. Once the MOU is signed, this would allow IOM to begin setting up the OPE in Damak. (Note: as of August 29, the MOU still had not been signed, perhaps in part due to two local Nepal holidays.)

#### Camp Census

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¶6. Abraham told the group that the Home Ministry was very near to certifying the results of the camp census begun in November 2006 and completed in May. The cases of fewer than 2,000 individuals out of a total population of approximately 106,000 are still being reviewed. Once the results are certified, UNHCR would issue ID cards that would improve camp security and the efficiency of resettlement processing. Abraham thanked the donors for their assistance in funding the census.

#### Exit Visas

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¶7. UNHCR staff described the current convoluted process for obtaining exit visas for refugees approved for resettlement, which could take many months. Abraham noted that the Home Ministry had promised that the current process would be simplified once large-scale resettlement processing commenced.

## Resistance to Resettlement

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¶8. Abraham and several other members of the group noted that, while the GON attitude toward resettlement as an option for the refugees had become positive, certain refugee factions still posed significant opposition to it. These factions were violently harassing those refugees who appeared to be interested in resettlement. Abraham also cited the activities of rejectionist leader Tek Nath Rizal, who in Damak on August 23, had demanded the release of the five suspects arrested in connection with assaults and vandalism in Beldangi 2 camp (para 3 above) and insisted that police not be deployed to the camps as planned. The Australian Ambassador suggested that Rizal, chairman of the Human Rights Council of Bhutan,, a pro-repatriation group, be confronted and informed that this sort of agitation was not helpful. (Note: The Core Group is expected to take this up at its next meeting on September 12.)

### "Resettlement Camp" Option for Security

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¶9. Abraham expressed hope that the APF deployed to the camps would be able to restore order and protect refugees from violent threats and intimidation, but suggested that the presence of police might not be sufficient. This was especially the case because the resettlement process for refugees might take four to six months. He suggested that a "resettlement camp" solely for the use of those pursuing

resettlement was one option that might be explored. Abraham described the idea as strictly a possible fall-back plan in the event the APF failed to restore order. (Note: GON officials, including the Prime Minister, in recent weeks have also raised the possibility of a special "resettlement camp.")

### India Ready To Support Repatriation to Bhutan?

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¶10. Donors discussed the comment reported in the press the week of August 20 by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in a letter to an Indian MP that "India will work with all parties, especially Nepal, in order to improve the state of refugees and find a solution that will ensure their dignity and well-being." Some parties interpreted this as support for the repatriation of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Abraham commented that he was attempting to obtain a copy of the Singh letter. The consensus among Donor Group members was that PM Singh's comment would have to be viewed with skepticism.

However, rejectionist refugee factions were likely to cite the Singh letter as evidence of new Indian support for repatriation and a reason not to pursue the resettlement option.

### Comment

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¶11. Donor Group representatives in Kathmandu in general are encouraged by the positive attitude of the GON toward resettlement processing and establishing security in the Bhutanese camps. They recognize that there are still pitfalls ahead and that the resettlement operations will require a sustained effort over several years, but appear more confident than ever of the GON commitment to the process.

POWELL